



OVERVIEW: ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE DISORDERS IN OUR SOCIETY

TARGETED OUTREACH

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Alcohol and drug use disorders—which include misuse, dependence, or addiction to alcohol and/or legal or illegal drugs—remain a major public health problem in the United States. The social cost of alcohol and drug use in the United States is staggering, estimated at more than \$294 billion in 1997.¹


How Common Are Alcohol and Drug Use Disorders?²

- More than 9 percent of the total population age 12 or older met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse in 2002.
- An estimated 19.5 million Americans (8.3 percent of the population age 12 or older) were current users of illicit drugs in 2002, meaning they had used an illicit drug at least once during the month prior to being interviewed.
- About 54 million Americans in 2002 (nearly 23 percent of the population age 12 or older) said they had participated in binge drinking (5 or more drinks on the same occasion) at least once in the last 30 days. Nearly 16 million said they were heavy drinkers (had 5 or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 5 days during the past month).


Who Is Affected by Alcohol and Drug Use Disorders?

Alcohol and drug use disorders can affect anyone. But those who are particularly vulnerable include people with a co-occurring mental disorder or those who have certain risk factors, including poverty or a family history of alcohol or drug use disorders.³

Alcohol and drug use disorders affect not just the people who are in need of treatment, but also their family members. Clearly, the effects of helping one person achieve recovery from an alcohol or drug use disorder can improve a multitude of lives.



“Being a product of abuse and neglect, drugs seemed to be the thing that dulled the pain and that other people and myself had in common. Unfortunately, my addiction became serious—where death was a reality—and the party ended. It was a turning point where God had given me back my life. I chose to never do drugs again, because life and the people in it are more important. There was nothing spiritual about drugs, which in a way was abuse to myself—why ever continue that destructive process? Sobriety has been a hard road, but the most rewarding choice yet.”



Pam Killingsworth
Member of People With Recovery & Disabilities (PWRD)

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Youth

- More than 36 percent of American 17-year-olds reported current alcohol use in 2002, and more than 11 percent of youths ages 12 to 17 reported current illicit drug use.⁴
- Some children are using drugs at age 12 or 13, and others may begin earlier. But families can help prevent alcohol and drug use disorders by creating strong bonds with their children, setting clear limits, and being actively involved with their children's lives.⁵
- As many as one in four children—19 million children or 28.6 percent of children under the age of 18—lives in a home where problems with alcohol are a fact of daily life.^{6, 7}
- But not all the statistics are negative. Use of marijuana, Ecstasy, LSD, cigarettes, and alcohol decreased significantly from 2001 to 2002 among 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in U.S. schools.⁸

Seniors

- Inadvertent misuse of prescription drugs is common among the elderly, who use prescription drugs three times more often than the general population does, and who may have difficulty complying with directions for taking a medication. Misuse of prescription drugs can lead to complications, including memory loss.⁹
- Only about 14 percent of treatment facilities have addiction treatment programs designed specifically for older adults.¹⁰

Men vs. Women

- Men are twice as likely as women to be considered to have an alcohol or drug use disorder, except among youths ages 12 to 17, when the prevalence of alcohol or drug use disorders is relatively the same for both genders.¹¹

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People of Color¹²

- The rates of current illicit drug use in 2002 were highest among American Indians/Alaska Natives (10.1 percent) and people of mixed race (made up of two or more races) (11.4 percent).
- Rates of illicit drug use were 9.7 percent for blacks, 8.5 percent for whites, and 7.2 percent for Hispanics. Asians had the lowest rate at 3.5 percent.

The impact of alcohol and drug use disorders is much greater than these numbers indicate. Alcohol and drug use disorders affect not just the people suffering from them, but also family members (particularly the children of those affected), friends, co-workers, and others who interact with them.¹³

For additional *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)* materials, visit our Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

Sources

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- 11 *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, p. 26.
- 12 *ibid*, p. 16.
- 13 *Improving Substance Abuse Treatment: The National Treatment Plan Initiative, Changing the Conversation*. DHHS Publication No. (SMA) 00-3479. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2000, p. 29.

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